



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“The Unpardonable Sin”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee again for the opportunity before us to consider the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the teaching concerning man and concerning sin. And, we thank Thee that Thou hast revealed to us the teaching and we thank Thee that through Jesus Christ, we have come to know the answer to the problem of sin. We pray tonight, as we consider a special aspect of the revelation concerning sin, that Thou wilt guide us and direct us and may our time spent be profitable to us and may it honor and glorify Thee.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject tonight is “The Unpardonable Sin” and will you turn with me, in your Bibles, to Matthew, chapter 12, verse 22 through verse 32. A parallel is found in Mark, chapter 3, but we are going to read the section in Matthew. Matthew chapter 12, verse 22 through verse 32.

“Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people

were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men.

And whosoever speaketh a word against the son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come.”

The Unpardonable Sin. We come to one of the most astonishing texts in all of the Bible. The proof of it is the fact that there is no evangelist traveling about without a sermon on the unpardonable sin. The reason is also clear. All sins may be forgiven except one, sins against Jesus Christ may be forgiven; but not sins against the Holy Spirit. What does that do to the doctrine of the Trinity? If it is true that the “son” is God, just as much as the Spirit is God, how can we say that a sin against the son of man may be forgiven but sin against the Holy Spirit may not be forgiven?

I think it should be evident to us that this text is a text that causes quite a bit of problem and perplexity, and so, it is surely worth the investigation. The usual teaching

on the “unpardonable sin” mainly that it is some specific sin that one may commit today, has lead to a great deal of anxiety, to a great deal of defeat, a great deal of distress and has even led to suicide.

Some years ago, in Dallas Seminary, when I was in seminary, we had a young man come from another theological seminary to study at Dallas. He had graduated from the University of Washington; he had already spent one year in a theological seminary, but he became troubled while he was at the other seminary, and when he transferred to Dallas Seminary, he and I became very good friends because we had some common interests. And, in the course of our friendship, he began to speak to me about the question of “unpardonable sin.” And then, finally, as our discussions deepened, he went on to tell me that he was troubled very, very much within his own spirit, and the thing that troubled him, particularly, was some question about whether he had committed the “unpardonable sin.” At the time, I was unable to give him much help but, nevertheless, it was evident to me that such things had meant a great deal to him, and if he was going to be an effective servant of Jesus Christ, he was going to have to find the answer to the question, whether he had committed the “unpardonable sin” or not.

Well, of course, we often think about all of our sins in the light of 1 John, 1:9 and it’s a very simple thing for us to say to people who have committed some sin, if we confess our sin, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleans us from all unrighteousness.” But, the “unpardonable sin” seems so unique that I know when I quoted this text to my friend that did not seem to have any effect upon him. And, it was evident that he, himself, had considered that a long time ago but was still troubled about “unpardonable sin.”

Well, if we are going to solve the problem of Matthew, chapter 12, one of the first things we must do is take a look at the context of the teaching of the Gospel of Matthew, and particularly, this passage in chapter 12. Remember, in the Gospel, the great theme is the preaching of the kingdom. The Lord, Jesus Christ, had come with a message

concerning the kingdom and his message was the message that John the Baptist had preceded him with. John had said, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.”

What he meant was that the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom were in process of being fulfilled and as the nation responded to the message, the king would come and establish his kingdom. The Lord, Jesus Christ, came and the message of our Lord, Jesus Christ, was the same message that John the Baptist preached. In fact, in Matthew, chapter 3:2, John’s message is said to be, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And then, in chapter 4, verse 17, our Lord preaches the identical message. “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Now, that preaching continued through the ministry of the Lord, until the time of Matthew, chapter 12. And, in Matthew, chapter 12 in verse 28, remember, Jesus said: “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.” He was busily preaching and teaching the kingdom of God, and he was also, authenticating the message that the kingdom would come by the miracles that he was performing. And, these miracles were designed to convince those who saw them that he truly was indeed the “king” who had been promised by Old Testament prophecy.

Now, here, in chapter 12 in verse 22, Matthew has told us that they brought to the Lord, “one possessed with a demon, blind, and dumb.” He is usually called the “dumb demoniac” by Bible expositors; and we read in verse 22 “And Jesus healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spoke and saw.” So, the “dumb demoniac’s” healing is the occasion of these words that our Lord speaks concerning the “unpardonable sin.” It is the occasion too of the charge by the Pharisees that Jesus is guilt of “black magic.” Now, his family had thought him deranged, too. So, it’s not surprising that the Pharisees should think the same. Over in Markian account of the same incident, we read in verse 21 of Mark, chapter 3, “And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.” And so, his family thinks that he is mad, and the Pharisees think that he is casting out demons by Beelzebub. So his enemies thought him

to be devilish and his own family thought him to be insane. At first, it’s not easy to distinguish between the attitude of the family of our Lord and the attitude of the Scribes. And, one wonders why Jesus speaks so sharply to the Scribes and accuses them of being in danger of committing “unpardonable sins” while he says nothing about his family who said that he is mad.

Now, probably, the reason for this is that while his family did think that he was beside himself, and did not understand, the Scribes were the official religious teachers of the day and, consequently, greater responsibility was theirs. They were the ones who should be expected to know the significance of the teaching of the Scriptures. And, I presume, that it is for this reason that Jesus speaks so sharply to them. I think, also, by the way, it stresses to us and for us the fact that this passage of the “unpardonable sin” has special reference to accredited teachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And, by accredited, of course, we mean those whom the Holy Spirit has given gifts of teaching. It is they who are particularly responsible to respond to the evidences of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Well, now, our Lord’s answer to the charge that he is casting out demons by Beelzebub is in short, picturesque, illusive maxim, and the principle is Satan does not cast out Satan. If it is true that these are demons, then how can I by Beelzebub, cast out demons; for in that case, Satan would be casting out Satan. Or, as we would say, dog does not eat dog, does it?

Well, that is our Lord’s general principle, but, he does it by means of a series of parables and, I want you to just notice this. We’ll just pass briefly through it and come to the central question. Notice, that in verse 25, he tells a little parable of a “divided kingdom” and a “divided house.” He says, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.” And then, the principle is given in verse 26, “If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?” You see, if it is true that I am by the power

of Satan casting out demons, I am in effect, a satanic agent in overthrowing the work of Satan. And so, there is division in the house of Satan.

Now, that obviously is an impossible thing. And, furthermore, he says in verse 27, “Your reasoning applied to me, but you should teach your own sons who claim that they cast out demons too. If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges.” And so, since some of the Pharisees sons, that is, their followers, were making claims of being able to cast demons out of people then by whom do they cast them out, our Lord says.

The true principle and its consequence is then given in verse 28, “If it is true on the other hand that I am casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.” In other words, if it is true that the Holy Spirit is with me in the work that I am doing, it is evidence that “the kingdom of God has come in your midst.” And, the fact that I am able to do this indicates my mastery over the forces of Satan and evil. “The kingdom of God is in your midst.”

He doesn’t stop with that. He tells them, in the 29<sup>th</sup> verse, the parable of the defeated strong man. “Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man?” Isn’t it interesting, that he calls Satan the “strong man” but if he was able to bind Satan, then he is a stronger man. “And then he will spoil his house.” And, finally, in verse 30, there is a word of application. “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.”

Anyone reading this text is reminded of the texts in the Gospel, which read, “He that is not with us, or is against us, is with us.” And, I want you to notice the distinction between this verse and that one. In that one, our Lord is talking about those who are not against him and those who are his disciples. And, the Lord says, “If they are not against us, they are with us,” so far as the preaching and teaching is concerned. They may not preach and teach as we do; they may go about it in a different way, but if they are not seeking to overthrow what we are doing, they’re with us.

But this text is much more personal. It has to do with the person of our Lord. “He that is not with me is against me.” In other words, there may be differences in ways of ministering the Gospel of Jesus Christ; but it is impossible for Christians to have any difference of opinion about Jesus Christ, himself. “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth aboard.” It is a claim for a total allegiance, and the same kind of allegiance to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are his disciples.

This text has its application, I think, in contemporary theology, particularly, because we do have people saying words like this: We are all Christians. We all acknowledge the same Lord, Jesus Christ. Of course, we may not necessarily have the same opinions about him. There are some who regard him as very God of very God, just as much God as the father is God. And there are others who only think of him as the “Son of God.” There are still others who think of him as a great example. But we’re all within the Christian family; and since we’re all within the Christian family we should extend love and fellowship to one another. And that, as far as I can tell, is totally contrary to the teachings of the Bible, and it is totally contrary to the teaching of the texts just such as this. “He that is not with me is against me.” In other words, there can be no difference of opinion concerning the person of Jesus Christ and his deity. He is “The Lord” and he must be acknowledged as the Lord in the ultimate sense, or else there is no partaking of the salvation that is in him.

We may have a great deal of difference concerning the ways in which we preach the Gospel. Some of us may delight in the way that Billy Graham preaches the Gospel. Still others may say, I do not, for myself, think that “mass” evangelism conducted in that way is really the best way to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, such have honest differences of opinion. And, the fact that they are not opposing the Lord means that they are not against him. And so, Christians should be allowed to prosecute the work of God as they see and think that it should be prosecuted. But, when we come to the person of Jesus Christ, there can be no differences of opinion concerning him.

Well, that brings us then to the question of the “unpardonable sin,” and the first question we want to ask is: What is the unpardonable sin? And let’s look at it in two ways, as I have on the outline on the projector. First, negatively and then positively.

And first of all, what is the unpardonable sin, negatively? There are some things I think we can say it is not and that may help to clarify our thinking. It is not in the first place, moral debauchery. It is not some kind of fleshly sin that we may commit. That is evident because in this particular passage, the Lord is speaking to Pharisees. Over in Mark they are called Scribes. Many of the Scribes were Pharisees. Many of the Pharisees were Scribes. These are the same groups that our Lord has in mind. And, of all the upright men in the community of Judaism, it is the Pharisees and the Scribes who stand right at the top of the list. So, it is evident that the sin that our Lord is speaking about here, sin against the Holy Spirit, is not moral debauchery. It is not some out breaking of fleshly kinds of sin. Further, it is not general sin; it is very specific. For, you will notice, that He says in verse 31, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.”

So, what he is talking about then is not moral debauchery; it is not something general, but it is something specific. Furthermore, over in Mark, chapter 3 and verse 28, in the Markian account, the word for sin is a word that means “an act of sin.” And so, we have to say that this is from acts of sin, it is some specific sin, and it is not general sin, it is not moral debauchery.

Well, let’s think about it positively. What can we say positively; just looking at our text? Well, here are some things we can say. First of all, it is a sin of blasphemy. We read in verse 24, “When the Pharisees heard it, they said, this fellow does not cast out demons but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.” Our Lord has healed a dumb demoniac. The Pharisees have looked at this healing and they have said, this dumb demoniac was not healed by virtue of the power of God; he was healed by virtue of the power of Beelzebub, or Satan himself. So, in effect, what they have done is to attribute to



Satan the work that was done by the Holy Spirit. So, the first thing that we can say is it is blasphemy. Will you turn over with me to Exodus, chapter 22 in verse 28. Exodus 22 in verse 28. In the Law of Moses, we read these words: “Thou shalt not revile god,” my text has the singular god, “nor curse the ruler of thy people.” Now, in many of the translations, this reads the plural, as the King James Version has and it may well be a reference to the “gods”, that is, the judges of the people. But the principle is obvious. If we are not allowed to revile the judges, who are looked upon as little gods, for they stand in as representatives of God, if we are not allowed to say anything against them in a reviling way, well, how much more does the will of God prohibit blasphemy? And so, first of all then, it is a sin of blasphemy, for it is the attributing to Satan of the work of God.

Second, it is sin, specifically, against the Holy Spirit. We read in verse 31 of chapter 12, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” Well, what kind of testimony is the Holy Spirit given here that forms the basis of this blasphemy? Well, Jesus said in verse 28, “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come upon you.” What does the Holy Spirit say? Well, the Holy Spirit would say, well, Jesus healed the dumb demoniac. But this is done by the power of God; and by this miracle, which has taken place, I am attesting to the credentials of the person who is performing the miracle. In effect, the Holy Spirit is saying, this is the king; by virtue of the fact that it is through these powers that Jesus is able to heal the dumb demoniac.

So it is sin against the Holy Spirit and Spirit’s testimony to the king. In verse 29, we read, “Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man?” So, the Holy Spirit is testifying that Jesus is stronger than Satan; and he is binding him. He is the binder of the strong man.

Further, it is the sin of refusing the kingdom and the king. Now, this follows as a natural corollary. If, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus heals the dumb demoniac, and

if, in that event, the Holy Spirit testifies to the power and authority of our Lord, Jesus Christ, as the king, then to say that what the Pharisees say, by Beelzebub he’s casting out demons and not by the power of God, then they are refusing the king; they are refusing the testimony to him; they are, therefore, refusing the king himself and his kingdom.

One Bible teacher that I listened to once, years ago, speaking on this, said: “To the credentials of the Messiah, Israel said, these are not the credentials of heaven; they are the credentials of hell.” So, this is precisely what they were doing. They were denying the clear testimony of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ was the king.

I am reminded of the text in the Old Testament, Isaiah, chapter 5, verses 19 through 21. Listen to it:

“That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!”

So, what were the Pharisees doing? Well, they were calling “good” evil. They were saying of “light” that it is darkness. They were saying of that which was sweet; it’s bitter. Well, that’s what the unpardonable sin is then. It is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in refusing the kingdom and the king.

Now, secondly, why is the sin unpardonable? And let’s look at this also, in two ways. And the first question I want to ask is: Why the greater guilt of sin against the Holy Spirit, than sin against the son of man? We’re taught in the Bible that there are three persons who are in the Trinity. There is one God who subsists in three persons; he subsists in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How is it possible for Jesus to say that sin may be forgiven when it is said against the “Son of Man,” but when it is said against the Holy

Spirit, it shall “not be forgiven him?” That would surely seem to suggest that the dignity of the Holy Spirit is greater than the dignity of the son of man.” But remember when we said in the Bible, we must be careful students of the Bible.

Why the greater guilt of sin against the Holy Spirit than sin against the son of man? Well, the solution, obviously, cannot lie, if our theology is correct, in the greater dignity of the Holy Spirit, for, if the son of man, if Jesus Christ is God just as much as the Holy Spirit is God, the Scriptures are plain on that point; then we must seek the solution somewhere else.

It really lies in another factor. It is true that Jesus Christ, in his person, is just as much God as the Holy Spirit is God, but what is peculiar about the son’s relationship and position at the present time? Well, what is peculiar about the son of man at this present time is that he, the second person of the trinity, is here on the earth in bodily form.

Remember, Paul says, “What the Law could not do in that it was linked to the flesh, God sending his own son in the “likeness” of sinful flesh.” Now, he doesn’t say, in the likeness of flesh, for he really had flesh. He does not say, in sinful flesh, for while he was in the flesh, his flesh was not sinful. But, he says he came, “In the likeness of sinful flesh.” In real flesh, but only “like” sinful flesh. Paul’s very about the description of our Lord’s incarnation. He’s so careful that you would think that he had been attending the Tuesday night theology classes at Believers’ Chapel. But now, what he said there is something of great significance. Over in Philippians, chapter 2, he says concerning the son, “Who, being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” And so, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who possessed all the essential attributes of deity, for that is the meaning of the expression “in the form of God.” There, possessing anything that belonged to deity, he emptied himself, the Greek text says, he took upon himself the form of a servant. He came in the “likeness of men,” to look at

him outwardly, he was only a man. And, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself further and became obedient unto the death, even the death of the cross.

Now, you see, it is evident that Paul in Philippians, chapter 2, regards our Lord as having entered into a time of humiliation. That time of humiliation was the time of incarnation. When he took to himself a body and he looked just like anyone else. If you had seen Jesus of Nazareth, there is not doubt in my mind that if he had not said anything you would have not thought him to be anything other than just a man. Perhaps something in his demeanor may have puzzled you a little, and then the moment that he began to speak you would have noticed that there was something unusual about him. But, he was just as much a man as you and I are men.

Lightfoot says, one of the great British commentators, says, “When Jesus came, he surrendered the insignia of his majesty.” That is, the things that marked him out as the majestic son of God were missing. He surrendered the insignia of his majesty; thus, for a time there was a veiling of his dignity, and so, sin against him while he was in this state of being “like” men, possessed of human nature, in the “likeness of sinful flesh,” sin against him in those days is still sin. Jesus does not deny that it is sin. He says, “Who shall ever speaketh a word against the son of man, it shall be forgiven him.” And so, to say a word against the son of man is a sin, no misunderstanding, but while it is a sin and blamable, it is pardonable. But, sin against the Holy Spirit, that is unpardonable. Why is it unpardonable when sin against the son of man is pardonable?

Well, the work of the Holy Spirit is not so veiled as the appearance of our Lord. For you see, when our Lord called upon the dumb demoniac’s demons to leave him, he looked like a man, only a man, he appeared to be a man such as you and I are.

But when the demons left that individual, it was evident that God had worked. Only God can call demons out of a demon-possessed man and, particularly, one who was also blind and dumb and who then spoke and saw. So, it is evident, that there is a tremendous manifestation of the power of God about which there is no real question. In

Jesus’ case, there may be some question. How can he be God? He’s only a man such as we are men. But when we look at what has happened, we say, it is the finger of God. And, to deny the son of man, to sin against him is a sin and blamable but forgivable. But to sin against pure, clear, light, which the Holy Spirit has given in his miraculous work, well, that is unpardonable. So to reject the testimony in the works is to boldly reject the person of the king. That’s why Jesus says, “He that is not with me is against me. And he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.”

A Roman Catholic commentator has made this comment, he takes the meaning to be that it is “excusable to a point, to fail to recognize the dignity of the one who hides himself under the humble appearance of a man. But not to despise works manifestly salutary, which reveal the actions of the divine spirit.” Now, I want to ask you a little question, since you’re a Bible student. Is there anything else in this text that might suggest that that is the proper interpretation of the passage? Let me read it to you again,

“Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come.”

Do you see anything in the text that might confirm what I have been trying to say to you? That is, that our Lord is here in humiliation and that is why sin against him, while blamable, is pardonable. Whereas, in the case of the Holy Spirit, the sin is blamable and since it is a clear testimony, it is also unpardonable.

Harry? You want to say something?

[Harry] When you say “son of man”... [indistinct]

[Johnson] You go to the head of the class! [Laughter] I was going to read it through again in case no one said anything about it and read it “Son of God” next time. But, you see, the very words which our Lord uses to describe himself is the word that suggests his time of humiliation. For the term, “son of man” derived from Daniel, chapter 7 is the term that our Lord uses to describe himself because in Daniel, chapter 7, the term “son of man” is the term that is used to describe the “king” before he receives the kingdom. There is a great picture of the heavenly aside, and the ancient of days is sitting upon the throne, and the son of man comes to receive the kingdom. But, he is called “son of man” while he is in the days of his humiliation. And, by the way, that is why Jesus called himself “son of man” so frequently. He identified himself with the character in Daniel, chapter 7, who had not yet received his kingdom, and so, he spoke of himself as the son of man. The Son of Man. He rarely ever spoke of himself as “Son of God.” Others spoke of him as “Son of God” but he rarely spoke of himself as “Son of God.”

Now, there are parables that he tells that imply it, and I’m not suggesting in any way that he did not regard himself as the Son of God, but if you wade through the Gospels, you’ll discover that for every time as he refers to himself as “Son of God” he refers to himself as “son of man” many times.

Son of man is the term for his humiliation. So, when he says, “whosoever speaketh a word against the son of man, it shall be forgiven him,” he merely confirms what we are talking about.

Capital B then, what constitutes its un-remissibility? How do you like that word? [Laughter] What constitutes its “unforgivable-ness”? Well, the answer to this question is, simply, it is a sin that precludes pardon because it precludes “repentance.”

What it is is deliberate, final, refusal of light, which reveals thereby a hardened impenetrable heart. Any sin is forgivable if a sin is unpardonable, it is because a pardonable sin has reached the state that it is necessary for God to judge. And, what is found here, then, is a case of judgment. It precludes pardon because it is the kind of sin

that suggests that the person has already passed beyond the state of being pardoned.

“Deliberate, final refusal of light, revealed thereby a hardened, impenetrable heart.”

The denial is not simply the utterance of an opinion; it reflects an attitude.

Now, I want you to turn with me to Mark, chapter 3 in verse 22, and I want you to see that the sin that the Pharisees and the Scribes committed was not simply the act of saying, when they saw the miracle, “That was done by Beelzebub.” I want you to see that this one incident was only the final in a long series of incidents in which they had manifested the same attitude. Mark, chapter 3 in verse 22. Now, we read, “And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the demons casteth he out demons.” Now, while you are looking at that text, I’m going to my Greek text and I’m going to translate the Greek text as it should be translated, and I want you to look at the text and let me read it and try to point out what I am trying to say. “And the scribes, who were from Jerusalem, when they came down, were saying he has Beelzebub.” Or, “kept on saying,” what does that “said” indicate? Just once? No, it is a continuation. Notice verse 30 of Mark, chapter 3, after Jesus has said, “whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit does not have forgiveness forever; but is guilty of eternal sin,” because, Mark says, “They were saying he has an unclean spirit.” The text, in the Greek, in both of these cases is imperfect. The imperfect tense in Greek indicates continued action in past time.

So in other words, what we have here in Mark, chapter 3, is not an isolated incident. We have the climax of a long period of rejection of the claims of Jesus Christ. The credentials that the king gave in the mighty miracles that he performed; they consistently rejected, they kept rejecting, they kept rejecting, until finally, this was the climax. He healed the dumb demoniac and they blurted out what had been in their hearts all along, “By Beelzebub he is casting out demons.” And so, what we have is not an isolated opinion, not an isolated expression of judgment upon that incident only, but it is the climax of rejection.

So, I think this interpretation is also supported by a couple of other things, so. The argument of the Book of Matthew and Mark to this point because everything in both of these books to this point is the story of rejection. And so this is the climax of rejection. But, in both of the incidents, don’t look at your Bible, what happens in Matthew chapter 13 and what happens in Mark chapter 4? Can anyone tell me? You’re sharp tonight, Harry. Now, explain that a little bit to us? What do you mean by that?

[Harry] “Well, He speaks more in parables and those who are enlightened, they can understand the parables, and those who are not don’t. What else does he say? That’s good. That’s exactly what I’m driving at. In both cases, before you go on further, in Matthew, chapter 13, the next chapter, Jesus begins to speak in parables. In Mark, chapter 4, the next chapter after the “unpardonable sin” he begins to speak in parables.

[Johnson] All right.

[Harry] “He goes out and speaks, and journeys, and [Inaudible] disciples.”

[Johnson] Well, some of that does take place, but, that doesn’t really bear, I don’t think, to directly on the point. What does he say in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter about those who have not responded? Well, let me read the text, Mark, chapter 4, verse 12. I’ll read verse 11. “And he said unto them, unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto those who are outside, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.” In other words, our Lord is saying, “From now on I’m going to speak in parables to prevent them from understanding and being forgiven.” Does that seem to be strong language? That’s our Lord’s language.

You see, he is speaking in judgment because they have consistently refused light, and refused light, and refused light, finally, the time comes when our Lord must speak in judgment. And so, he begins to speak in parables enlightening those who have responded, through a private interpretation and teachings, and also through the help of



the Holy Spirit, no doubt. But, in the case of those without, blinding and hardening them because they have refused the light.

Well, I think now I am beginning to understand what is meant by “The Unpardonable Sin.” You see, it is a fact of God that the more light is poured on the eyeballs, the greater the gloom, if we do not respond.

Sin has a tendency to “numb” the conscience. And the more we sin, repeated exposure to any form of stimulation tends to dull ones sensibilities; and so, finally, the stimulation loses all effect. And so, when we continue to refuse the convicting power of the Holy Spirit then our own spiritual sensibilities become duller and duller and duller. In judgment, finally, we reach the state that there is no healing. That’s what the Bible teaches in the Old Testament. In 2 Chronicles, chapter 36 in verse 16 the statement is made that God sends the prophets to Israel and he sent the prophets to Israel, and they rejected them, rejected them until finally, the writer of the Chronicles says, “Till there was no remedy.”

So, what then is “Unpardonable Sin?” Well, the unpardonable sin is the rejection of the clear testimony of the Holy Spirit to the kingship of Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh. There is such a thing as “Unpardonable Sin.”

I read a story that Sybil Baxter used to tell about a minister acquaintance of his. And this minister said to him that he had just visited the death bed of one of his members of his church. And he told Dr. Baxter of a terrible experience that he had had there. He said the dying man was writhing and struggling, and striking the air in a piteously futile effort to fight death off. He was in stark terror at the thought of death. And, eventually, he died demented. But, both before and after his brain gave way, he would periodically groan or wail. So the minister told Dr. Baxter, “I said I would repent before I died; but it won’t come. It won’t come. I can’t repent.”

One final question, when is the sin committed? There are indications from our text in Matthew that the sin can only be committed when the “king” is personally present.

For, our text says, verse 32, “Whoever speaketh a word against the son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come.” It would seem that this special form of the sin may only be committed when the king is here in person. And, that of course, was when he was here in humiliation. Perhaps, also, it will be a sin that can be committed in the kingdom age when he is here again. But, I am inclined to question that. I do think that the special form of this sin was a sin that was committable only when our Lord was here in the flesh.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus only spoke once of the “unpardonable sin?” Have you ever noticed, in contrast to evangelists who always preach at least one sermon on the unpardonable sin in a series of evangelistic meetings, have you ever noticed that in the rest of the New Testament there is no reference to “unpardonable sin?” Have you ever noticed that Paul never says anything about “unpardonable sin?” Have you ever noticed that? It was a special circumstance. The specific form of it that is given here could only be committed when the king was personally present. It could only be said then that sin against the son of man is blamable, but forgivable, whereas, sin against the Holy Spirit is blamable and “unforgivable.”

Well, let me conclude, while the unpardonable sin may not be committed now an unpardonable sin may be committed. The unpardonable sin, of course, now, is refusal of Jesus Christ. It is not right to say, doctrinally, in my opinion, it’s not right to say that if we refuse to believe in Jesus Christ, who died for sins, that we must then bear our sins.

There is no such thing as “double jeopardy” in the Bible. We cannot say Jesus Christ died for sins and then die for them ourselves. But, it is a Biblical thing to say that there is an “unpardonable sin,” the refusal to accept Jesus Christ as Savior. And there is a legitimate application of unpardonable sin to any prolonged rebellion against God. The same principle operates that if we persist in rejection of the truth; there comes a time when we must be subject to the judgment. There is a time when there is no remedy. I

do not know that time. You cannot know that time, perhaps. Certainly, we cannot know that time about each other. But, we have to, in our theology, recognize that there is a time when judgment may become such that a person cannot be saved. It is something brought on by his own rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a history of a man in the Bible, who committed an unpardonable sin. His name is Herod. Listen to the testimony of Herod. I’m just going to read you some texts and make a comment. First, Mark, chapter 6 and verse 20. And I want you to notice the progress in Herod’s life.

“For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was much perplexed; and he heard him gladly.”

So, King Herod listened to John the Baptist and was “greatly impressed” by what he heard. In fact, he knew that John was righteous and holy. Then, later on, we read, Luke chapter 3, verse 19 and 20, “But Herod the tetrarch, being reprovved by him for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things which Herod had done, added this also to them all: that he shut up John in prison.” So, here is Herod who rejoiced to hear John, shutting him up in prison. Now, in Mark, chapter 6, verse 27, the story of Herod progresses. “And straightaway, the king sent forth a soldier of his guard and commanded to bring his head: and he went and beheaded him in the prison.” So, here is the man who heard John gladly, who thought he was a holy and righteous man; now, he beheads him. Luke, chapter 13, verse 31, “In that very hour there came certain Pharisees to Jesus, “get thee out and go hence, for Herod would feign kill thee.”

Now, the Herod who thought John holy and righteous who heard him gladly, but who has now been responsible for John’s death, is seek to kill our Lord, Jesus Christ. And, finally, you remember, in Luke, chapter 23, Herod finally looked upon the face of

Jesus of Nazareth, and we read these strange and solemn words, “Now, when Herod saw Jesus he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.”

Now, you see the extent of Herod’s interest. It is not in himself and his spiritual condition. It is not in the character and person of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is a kind of desire, an unholy desire, to see Jesus perform a mighty miracle. And so, now, you would think our Lord would say, “Now is my opportunity, here’s my opportunity to give him the full spiritual law.” No, the text says, “And he questioned him in many words.” Herod asked our Lord many questions. “Who are you? Where have you come from? What have you done? By what power have you done these things?” But he answered him. What? Nothing. Why? Is our Lord the kind of person who doesn’t want to see people come to know God? Or to himself? No. There was never a man who wanted to see a man saved more than Jesus Christ. But, you see there comes a time when there is no voice of God for the man who has spurned and rejected constant pleading from the Holy Spirit and, finally, is the subject of judgment. And so, in grace and mercy, Jesus says nothing to Herod. For, it would only bring his condemnation to a greater degree. So, our Lord answers nothing. Herod has committed unpardonable sins.

Most of us have known of Aaron Burr as a man with a shady past. I was going to tell this story before the *Wall Street Journal* came out yesterday or last week with an article about Aaron Burr. [Laughter] This was the heading of the article; I thought it was pretty good. Below are two names: Pick Good Guy and Bad, A. Burr, A. Hamilton. No, you picked wrong, dummy. Or, so says Samuel Burr who thinks about it a lot. Samuel Burr, a descendant of Aaron Burr, has a little society which is dedicated to restoring the memory, the dignity of Aaron Burr.

When I preached on Princeton University’s campus about fifteen years ago, a couple of series of meetings up there, there was a young Christian fellow who was getting ready to graduate. And, all of his friends were telling me about Bill Rush. They said,

now, Bill Rush has a chance to beat Aaron Burr’s scholastic record at Princeton. Aaron Burr was there in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but 150 years later no one had ever, to that time, beaten his scholastic record at Princeton University. It may be, that today, he still holds the record for the highest average of any graduate of Princeton University. But we know that the latter part of Aaron Burr’s life was clouded by scandal and most people think of Aaron Burr as a traitor to the country.

Many of you may not know the story of Aaron Burr and the gospel meetings on the campus of Princeton University. When he was nineteen years of age, a brilliant student, a revival broke out on the campus. He was deeply convicted. His roommate asked him to accept Jesus Christ as his Savior, and he was almost persuaded. He went to see one of his professors and he told his professor about his dilemma. The professor gave him a Bible and said, “Go to your room and pray to this matter on your knees.” Instead of doing it, he tried to shake off the power of the Holy Spirit in conviction. And, finally, in desperation, he cried out, “God, let me alone and I’ll let you alone.” And as soon as he said it, all conviction left him.

Years later, he met a friend whom he admired very much, and this friend said to him, “Dr. Burr, I’d like to have you meet a friend of mine.” And, Dr. Burr said, “If he’s anything like you, I’d be glad to meet him.” His friend said, “His name is Jesus Christ. I’d like for you to meet him.” According to the account, cold sweat broke out on Aaron Burr’s forehead, and he told about this experience at age nineteen, when he said, “God, let me alone and I’ll let you alone.” And then he said, “From that day to this, I’ve never had one desire to be a Christian.” We may not be able to commit the unpardonable sin in the sense of Matthew, chapter 12, but it is possible for a man to commit unpardonable sin.

What would we do if we were to face someone who, like my friend, in Dallas Seminary, had felt that he had committed unpardonable sin. Well, I think most of us could go to the Bible and say, look, unpardonable sin, in the sense of the Bible, was

rejection of Jesus Christ over and over again, until finally, it was necessary for God to judge.

Unpardonable sin is for the man who has no spiritual sensibility. Unpardonable sin is for the man who having rejected conviction has now become so callous to the word of God that he can say, “What is said to be the Holy Spirit’s work is really Satan’s work.” And, we can truly say the man who is concerned, truly concerned, about committing unpardonable sin is the one least likely to have committed unpardonable sin.

My friend became convinced of that and he is a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ now, in the west, and preaches, so far as I know, the pure Gospel every Sunday convinced that he has not committed unpardonable sin.

Next Tuesday night will be our last study in this series. Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the word of God. And, while Lord, we know that we cannot commit unpardonable sin in this specific sense, of Matthew, chapter 12, and while we know as Christians that we cannot commit this sin, we do realize that it is a solemn thing to hear the word of God over and over again and fail to respond to it. So, enable us Lord, to be not only faithful in the proclamation of the Truth, but enable us to be responsive to its teaching. Speak to us, Lord, and use us for Thy glory through the Holy Spirit.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.